

St Swithun's VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109604
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	377950
Inspection dates	24–25 April 2012
Lead inspector	Miranda Perry

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Lower
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	178
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sonya Carey
Headteacher	Anita Whitehurst
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2008
School address	Ivel Road Sandy SG19 1AX
Telephone number	01767 680692
Fax number	01767 690992
Email address	stswithuns@deal.bedfordshire.gov.uk

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

Inspection team

Miranda Perry

Additional inspector

Sa'ad Khaldi

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Twenty lessons or part lessons were observed, amounting to about seven hours in total, taught by six teachers, of which five were joint observations with the headteacher. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and staff. Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including the school's documents for self-evaluation and safeguarding. Inspectors observed the school's work and studied standards in reading, the work pupils were doing in their books and the tracking system used to monitor pupils' progress. Inspectors considered the 125 questionnaires completed by parents and carers as well as those from pupils and staff.

Information about the school

St Swithun's is a smaller than average-sized lower school. The majority of pupils are White British. The number of pupils from minority ethnic heritages, or pupils who speak English as an additional language, is average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is above average. The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs, called the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit, which was opened in September 2009 and has eight pupils on role. The school has received the gold Sing Up award, the International Schools award, the Activemark award, and National Healthy Schools status. It runs a daily breakfast club.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Attainment is above national expectations by the end of Year 4. The progress of pupils in the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit is good. Some pupils with autistic spectrum disorder make outstanding progress. The school is not yet outstanding because teaching is not outstanding and whole-school planning is not sufficiently focused on outcomes for pupils.
- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They benefit from the exciting and challenging learning experiences. Pupils continue to progress well in Key Stage 1 and by the end of Year 2 reach above-average attainment. They enjoy their learning because teaching is good. However, whole school targets, which form the basis of school improvement planning, are not always sufficiently focused on progress and attainment. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make outstanding progress because of the high quality support they receive.
- The curriculum gives pupils a good range of learning opportunities that inspire and help them to develop as considerate individuals, who act safely, behave well and have a sophisticated understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. In the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit the social development of pupils is a strength which has an extremely positive impact on their progress.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and are consistently courteous and polite around the school. In the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit pupils' behaviour is outstanding, because they feel extremely safe in a calm setting. Pupils' attendance is below average, but there is evidence of recent, rapid improvement.
- Leaders and managers develop effective performance management programmes of mentoring and support, but mainly for new staff. These programmes are not fully broadened out into a whole school strategy for

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teaching and learning, to make more lessons outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine the focus of whole school improvement plans so that targets for particular groups of pupils are based on specific, measurable outcomes, by September 2012.
- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching to 50% of lessons by April 2013 through:
 - developing the subject leader monitoring role of teaching and learning and acting on their findings
 - expanding the induction programme for teachers new to the school into a whole school strategy for improving teaching and learning.
- Raise attendance to at least national averages by June 2013, by building on current strategies, including the use of existing technologies, to target pupils whose absence falls below the national average.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' good learning and above-average attainment are evident in the records of progress they make over time, their work in books and in the lessons seen during the inspection. For example, in a Year 3 class, pupils progressed from identifying adjectives to using them effectively in complex sentences. Parents and carers also say that their children are making good progress at the school.

Pupils make good progress in response to the setting of individual targets which are written in pupil-friendly language. Pupils commented that when they looked at their targets, it helped them focus on what they needed to do to improve their work.

The pace of progress is good, and if gaps between the progress of different groups appear, the school develops strategies that close them. The adoption of learning resources that meet the interests of Key Stage 2 boys has closed the gap in progress between boys' and girls' writing.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make outstanding progress because of the school's inclusive practices and the impact on achievement made by well-trained, highly skilled teaching assistants.

Pupils' attainment in reading, at the end of Year 2 is above average, and by the time

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they leave the school, it is around four months ahead of the national average. For example, in discussion with Year 4 pupils about books, they were beginning to infer meaning. Of his favourite book, one boy said, 'It's the character's red eyes. He's up to no good.'

Pupils at St Swithun's enjoy reading and love their new school library. Enjoyment of books, stories and growing understanding of the sounds letters make is fostered in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children enter the Nursery with knowledge, skills and abilities well below national expectations for their age and, due to good progress, leave Reception below national expectations, achieving well in the areas of physical development, and language for communication and thinking. Progress in reading is good in the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit because letters and sounds are taught in a way that engages pupils and ensures they respond positively to high expectations. The youngest children in the unit acquire cognitive skills particularly well, because activities consolidate their learning. Pupils make good progress in numeracy, as a result of a curriculum highly refined to meet their individual needs.

Quality of teaching

Pupils benefit from good teaching across the school, and most parents and carers recognise that their children are being taught well at St Swithun's. The teaching of reading is good, because staff have a sound knowledge of how to improve pupils' literacy and pupils are put into reading groups which focus well on narrowing gaps in learning. Teachers use effective questioning and routinely adjust activities to match the range of abilities. A thorough assessment process gives pupils the confidence to judge their progress accurately, and celebrate their own success. For example, a group of girls in Year 3 said that in numeracy, sometimes they felt shy to admit they had understood a concept, but when the teacher had marked their book and talked to them, they knew their shyness was misplaced.

The school uses spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities well to advance pupil progress. Music plays a central part at St Swithun's, and it is used effectively to improve pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills. A pupil with special educational needs said he knew what 'alphabetical' meant because he was allowed to sing the alphabet. The school adopts comprehensively inclusive practices so that the classroom is a place where disabled pupils and those with special educational flourish and thoroughly enjoy their learning.

In most lessons, pupils are excited about learning. This is particularly true when they are experiencing the school's international curriculum. Key Stage 2 pupils had a sophisticated understanding of Roman soldiers' lives, because they relished being allowed to dress up as Romans. However, in a minority of lessons, there is a lack of pace and pupils are less engaged. A whole school strategy for teaching and learning is not fully in place to remove inconsistencies in challenge and pace.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

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Pupils, parents and carers are convinced that good behaviour in and around the school is well established. Pupils are particularly mindful of making visitors and new pupils feel welcome. One Key Stage 2 pupil said, 'We do our best to make new children happy here.'

Pupils concentrate well in class, and respond to the high expectations placed on them in terms of participation, and taking their learning seriously. Pupils say that bullying doesn't happen very often and if it does, they feel well equipped to deal with it, particularly through their 'playground pal' programme, which they think helps to keep the playground free from bullying related to special educational needs, given the context of the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit. Pupils appreciate the schools' strategies to make them aware of cyber-bullying.

Behaviour in the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit is outstanding because of strategies which give pupils plenty of opportunities to get along together, and well-managed mixed-age and mixed-gender groups. Induction processes mean that new pupils settle in, feel safe, and behave well extremely quickly.

Pupils at St Swithun's feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep safe, especially when it comes to new technology. Their attendance is below average but the impact of measures taken by the school means that it is rapidly improving.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers at St Swithun's are passionate about their school, and the ethos – of learning within a framework of core moral values – is shared by all the staff. Staff are wholeheartedly positive about how the school is led.

Leaders and managers have demonstrated the school's strong capacity to improve by successfully identifying and developing staff's strengths as teachers. This is particularly the case in the Autistic Spectrum Condition Provision Unit and the Early Years Foundation Stage, where staff have been well deployed and supported with a coherent programme of professional development, to bring about significant pupil progress over time.

The school has been successful in improving the practice of teachers who are new to the school. However, the improvement programme is not yet applied across the whole staff, and middle leaders do not actively participate in the monitoring of teaching and build their findings into the improvement programme. As a result, there are still a few examples of satisfactory teaching at the school.

The school promotes equality of opportunity well because staff work hard to close any gaps with national averages for all groups of pupils. This promotion contributes to making St Swithun's an inclusive community in which discrimination is not tolerated, and one which takes its responsibility to its community seriously through, for example, its very well attended programme of coffee mornings and for parents

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and carers with toddlers.

St Swithun's leaders and managers believe that all pupils have an entitlement to a broad, balanced, and exciting curriculum, which develops the pupils socially, morally, culturally and spiritually. The school gives priority to preparing pupils for the next stage of their life. It runs a credit union, where pupils from all year groups save money regularly and develop their numeracy skills in a real life context. Nearly all pupils attend an after-school club, and they cite their guitar, recorder and art clubs as some of their favourite things at the school. Pupils are particularly positive about the breakfast club, which provides healthy food and a friendly, family atmosphere. One pupil said, 'The breakfast club is really awesome; it is luxury.'

Effective monitoring and assessment of attainment and achievement enables the school to track every pupil with vigilance and ensures that its high expectations are met. However, school improvement planning does not link effectively with school tracking and is not sufficiently based on focused targets that specify challenging, achievable, measurable outcomes for the attainment and progress of pupil groups.

The governing body ensures that arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Governors have a thorough knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and have been successful in using their expertise to support school improvement. For example, financial expertise within the governing body has been used by middle leaders to help them review strategies for improving the progress of girls in numeracy.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 April 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Swithun's VC Lower School, Sandy, SG19 1AX.

My colleague and I thoroughly enjoyed our two days inspecting your school. Thank you for making us most welcome. Your enthusiasm, good behaviour and support for the school really impressed us. We agree with you that you learn a lot and we note that you told us that you are happy to come to school.

You go to a good school. You make good progress and learn well. You told us about, and we saw for ourselves, some really exciting learning, although we agree with you that occasionally, some lessons are less exciting than others. We admire the way you respect each other and your school. We think, as you do, that most of the time the school manages your behaviour well.

Teaching is good, and we know that you appreciate and understand the targets the teachers give you. You get on very well with your teachers, and respond to their high expectations of you. Teachers have a very good understanding of the different ways you learn and where you are up to. Standards in English and mathematics are above average by the end of Year 4. All of you achieve well.

We have asked your headteacher and governors to make sure that teaching goes on getting better, and that all teaching is as good as the rest. We have asked the school to make sure that when it plans for your learning, it sets targets for itself that are very clear. We have also asked them to do all they can to ensure that your attendance continues to improve.

You can help by continuing to work hard and meet your own targets, and by continuing to be enthusiastic about your learning and coming to school all the time.

Yours sincerely

Miranda Perry
Lead inspector

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